THE CLEVELAND
MUSEUM OF ART
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OBJECT LESSONS: CLEVELAND CREATES AN ART MUSEUM
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The exhibition, like an archaeological dig, unearths evidence of decisive events and powerful personalities that over 75 years shaped the Museum collection and the Museum's distinctive place in Cleveland and in the art world. Focusing on pivotal personalities and occasions, this 75th anniversary exhibition chooses more than 200 works of art from the permanent galleries, archival materials, and photographs to animate the collection in the context of the community and the people who made it possible.

From the beginning the Museum was a collective creation. At the end of the 19th century three men--John Huntington, Hinman Hurlbut, and Horace Kelley--separately bequeathed money, and a fourth, J. H. Wade, donated land, for art museums. After two decades of negotiations, a single art museum was created and its first director chosen: Frederic Allen Whiting, a proponent of the Arts and Crafts movement and an educator of near-missionary enthusiasm.

Object Lessons marks turning points in the Museum's life, among them:

- 1930, the second director, William M. Milliken, is appointed, and objects from the medieval German Guelph Treasure are acquired, the culmination of the first collecting phase (the purchase that "put Cleveland on the map," it was said)--but one of the few major purchases the Museum could make during the Depression.

- 1942, major gifts and bequests begin to come to the Museum, most from such longtime benefactors as Leonard C. Hanna, Jr., John L. Severance, and Grace Rainey Rogers, but also, in a pattern often to be repeated, unexpected gifts from such interested members as Mr. and Mrs. William Marlatt, expressing affection for the Museum.

- 1958, the newly appointed third director, Sherman E. Lee, enabled by Leonard C. Hanna, Jr.'s bequest, the largest gift to an American museum until that time, has the means to pursue one of the most aggressive acquisitions programs in American museum history.

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Milliken's taste as curator of decorative arts and painting under Whiting had already begun to shape the new collection, and he found the perfect match in J. H. Wade, a perceptive donor who became Board president in 1920. Milliken believed his primary purpose as director was to lead in building the collection. He did so in nearly every area. His eclectic tastes--often for small, intricately worked three-dimensional objects, most powerful in European medieval decorative art but also embracing manuscript illuminations, Renaissance bronzes, and 18th-century French decorative arts--reinforced Cleveland's reputation as a museum of objects. (He had also purchased fine American paintings in the 1920s--such as Winslow Homer's *Early Morning After a Storm at Sea* for the then staggering sum of $50,000 and George Bellows' *Stag at Sharkey's* for a more reasonable $2,000--but that part of the collection fell dormant until the 1960s).

Milliken relied on his emotional response to art, a habit that generally served him well with material he found most appealing. Having discovered one piece that excited him, he would search for related objects, either all at the same time or within a short span of years, and then make no further acquisitions in that field. It happened with Venetian and Central European glass, Italian majolica, French ceramics, Byzantine and Islamic art. He dismissed the idea of building collections in a systematic fashion, which he compared to filling in a stamp album. Fine examples of his taste include an Etruscan bronze of the 4th century BC; a Classic Veracruz terracotta head dated 5th-9th century; two 11th-century monuments of religious art--the Byzantine *Stroganoff Ivory* and the portable altar of the Guelph Treasure; a silver-gilt and enamel French *Table Fountain* of the 14th century; a bronze bowl inlaid with silver, part of a trove of 13th-century Islamic materials from Iran; and Odilon Redon's dreamlike pastel, *Orpheus*.

The 1930s must have been difficult for Milliken; a constant struggle for funds forced acquisitions to an almost complete halt for about eight years. When in the early 1940s significant funds for acquisitions began to come to the Museum, he bought Renoir's *Mlle. Lacaux* and Gauguin's *L'Appel*, using the new Hanna Fund, and Goya's *Portrait of the Architect Don Juan*

Antonio Cuervo from the Marlatt Fund, an unexpected bequest and the first specifically for paintings. The Pre-Columbian collection, notable as one of the first in an American art museum, was enriched by Helen Humphreys, a teacher of Spanish in the Cleveland public schools. "Year in and year out, for twenty years or more," Milliken recorded, "she contributed from her salary until sums had accumulated to buy pieces the Museum coveted." As major European collections were dispersed after World War II, the Museum's acquisition pace quickened, and curators Henry S. Francis and Leona Prasse, with Milliken, purchased great Old Master prints.

Milliken's curator of ancient and Asian art from 1952 on, Sherman E. Lee, succeeded him as director in 1958. Taking what he called "a hard look" at the Museum's collection, Lee judged it admirable in medieval European decorative arts, Pre-Columbian, textiles, and prints and drawings. He found the small though excellent holdings in ancient and Asian material lacking depth and breadth, the main Western tradition of post-Renaissance art "unevenly represented in both quality and quantity," and the twentieth century "only feebly represented." With curators and trustees, Lee set out to develop the collection systematically. Leonard C. Hanna, Jr.'s bequest in 1958 more than doubled the annual acquisitions budget and enabled the Cleveland Museum for the first time in its history to compete on equal terms with larger and older art museums.

Lee cut a swath through dealer's showrooms. He acquired Iranian goldwork, Coptic textiles, a great Hititte sculpture of a priest-king. He went after American paintings, not then in great demand, such as Church's masterpiece *Twilight in the Wilderness*. His best-known additions to the Museum collection are works of art from Asia; in twenty years he turned a good but minor collection into the greatest comprehensive collection of Asian art in the United States. The subtle *Nikko, the Sun Bodhisattva*, a "flung-ink" Japanese landscape painting, a delicate Chinese ink painting *Swallow and Lotus* by Mu-chi, a Nepalese *Bodhisattva*--these few in the exhibition stand for the superb collection in the permanent galleries. Like Milliken, Lee was fortunate in his Board presidents; Emery May Norweb, the only woman to serve in that post, was a formidable collector and supporter of Lee's judgments.

The trustees declined to include contemporary art in their accessions deliberations, preferring to give Lee and his curator of modern art, Edward B. Henning, a small annual stipend to spend as they wished. Even with a late start and modest funds, they acquired an oil and pencil by Gorky of 1943, Motherwell's 1944 collage *Mallarmé's Swan*, de Kooning's *Figure* of 1949, and one of Cornell's boxes, among 55 works they bought between 1960 and 1970, when the trustees relented and agreed to consider contemporary art. A Society for Contemporary Art was formed to help the Museum acquire 20th-century works.

Encouraged by Turner since 1983, the Museum has undertaken new commitments to contemporary art and photography. The recent unexpected appearance on the market of rare Tibetan and Central Asian materials and great opportunities in ancient art have added to the collection works that open new understandings of both Asian and Western history and culture.

Evan Turner's observation that the Museum collection is "as interesting as it is distinguished" applies to the institution itself, at once a respected member of the international art world and a vigorous member of its home community. An ideal the Museum declared at the outset and has faithfully practiced ever since--education and service for every part of the community--reflects Cleveland's tradition of communal cooperation. As the community and the Museum have nurtured each other, the Museum has flourished as a resource for successive generations.

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